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THE PROBLEM METHOD OF TEACHING IDEALS

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The purpose of education—human progress.—In his introduction to *Educational Values* Professor Bagley says that education is “a process of modifying conduct.” He might have said that it is a process planned for the purpose of modifying conduct. An education which fails to modify conduct is not worth while. Furthermore education purposes to modify conduct in the direction of progress. The full aim of education is the improvement of human conduct.

Progress means moving toward some goal, attaining ideals. Conduct can be improved in one way only: by seeking to attain ideals. Education is therefore the means for teaching standards of value or ideals in order that they may be realized in conduct. The goals, standards, or ideals are changing from generation to generation, from year to year, even from day to day; but though they are changing, they are nevertheless genuine objectives of effort, and because they are striven for they show results in types of character.

Spartan education will illustrate the effectiveness of an ideal in producing results. The history of education describes the Spartan aim of giving to each individual physical perfection, courage, and habits of obedience to law. So carefully planned and regulated was the life of each child to produce this result that, as Monroe says, the Spartan man possessed “a bravery, power, endurance, and self-control that was often wanting, sometimes conspicuously so, in the

other Greeks." The Spartan, educated for courage, obedience, and physical perfection, was very different from the Athenian, who was educated for "virtue," beauty, and knowledge. The Spartan excelled in war, the Athenian in art, literature, and statesmanship.

The value of instruction in ideals has been exemplified recently in the nation-wide legislation to bring about prohibition. About thirty years ago Miss Frances E. Willard inaugurated a campaign to have the evil effects of alcohol taught in every school in America. The success of this instruction is just now coming to its full realization. That generation which was taught lessons in temperance is now managing the affairs of the nation. Thoughtful publicists believe that the physiology lessons of twenty-five years ago are today bearing fruit in legislation.

The history of the human race is an epitome of changing ideals, with school curricula changing to meet these progressive requirements. School curricula must embody the ideals which must be realized in order that the race may be made better. Children must learn to appreciate and use moral ideals, physical ideals, social ideals, practical ideals, and aesthetic ideals. The teaching of these ideals effectively is a vital problem in present-day technique.

In order to handle the problem of teaching ideals it is necessary to understand the experience of children in acquiring and using them. The first step in learning to teach ideals is the examination of the psychology of appreciating values. When we have discovered how values operate in the control of behavior, and the causes which produce them, the next step will be to inquire whether the production and development of values can be effected in the schoolroom. Can the teacher cause values and ideals to arise and function in the child's experience? Can the teacher help to produce moral, social, or aesthetic ideals which will be effective in governing the conduct of the citizen?

The final step will show how ideals may be taught. Methods of teaching ideals will then be the last topic to be discussed.

The psychology of appreciation.—It is not the intention in the present paper to indulge in finely drawn distinctions of terminology, and the terms used will be given no recondite technical significance.

Such words as value, interest, purpose, appreciation, and ideal will not imply anything more than they always mean in our everyday vocabulary.

A description, however, of that experience which we all have, and which we call appreciation, is essential. Appreciation is our feeling for the value of something. We appreciate things—pictures, music, good behavior, food, a lesson learned, a bird's nest, missing a tiresome caller, or catching a car.

Jerry needs some new shoes. He wants four dollars with which to buy the shoes. A druggist lends him four dollars on condition that he will deliver packages Saturday afternoons to pay it back. Jerry appreciates the money. He appreciates the druggist's generosity. He feels the value of the money which has been loaned. He appreciates the value of a kind-hearted man who finds ways to help needy boys.

May's problem in division is another illustration of an experience of appreciation. May could not remember how many times 71 goes into 200. She was anxious to finish the problem before the end of the hour but was held up until she could find the answer to her question. She tried 2 at random, and discovering her remainder less than 71 she proceeded with her solution. She appreciated her lucky guess because it enabled her to finish her work on time.

In these illustrations the thing which was appreciated was something which helped out of difficulty or furthered experience in directions which were interesting. Analysis of the illustrations shows that the thing which was appreciated solved some problem. Even the appreciation of a bird's nest involved the solution of a problem. Perhaps it was spring and we were looking for a bird's nest; the finding of one directly settled that activity satisfactorily. But perhaps the problem was more obscure. The bird's nest may have been discovered accidentally while we were thinking about something else. The bird's nest appears in our field of vision, and the trend of our thinking is interrupted by some such exclamation as, "Here then is where that old robin has hidden herself!" The nest solves some problem which occurred at some previous time, although it may not have been interesting enough to make us seek the nest.

Let us ask the question, Do I want to find a bird's nest? Do I want to hear music? Do I want to catch my car? Do I want to miss a tiresome caller who interferes with the things I need to do? *Want* means a need, a consciousness of lack of something. The something which we want, need, lack, is the value which, when attained, we appreciate. If there is a want there is an unsolved problem, an uncompleted activity.

We appreciate that which satisfies our wants. Appreciation occurs in our experience then when some want has been satisfied. When we *feel satisfaction* in the fulfilment of some need, the solution of some problem, we are appreciating.

This description of appreciation has involved its function in our experience; but perhaps a little more needs to be said about its function, or the effects it produces within our experience. Whenever we feel satisfied with a thing, or appreciate its value, we will be inclined to use the same thing again if we get into a similar situation. A satisfactory solution of a problem will be remembered, while all the unsatisfactory solutions will be forgotten. Appreciation of values enables us to use our past experience for the benefit of our present needs. Without appreciation of values there could be no learning, in the sense that past experience would then not teach lessons for present troubles.

Ideals always present and always changing.—Values are the object of appreciation. We appreciate a book: it is a value. Obviously, however, some values have had much more to do with preserving life and furthering vital activities than have other values. Also an ideal will appear of great value until it is realized; then another ideal will appear as the end to be striven for. Again, a realized goal often proves disappointing, and our values need to be readjusted in terms of the disappointment. Midas wanted gold more than anything else, until his daughter became transmuted. Then Midas realized that his gold was not the highest value for him.

When a thing is satisfactory and meets all the needs of experience it remains as a value; but whenever it is not completely satisfying it loses some of its value, and experience seeks for a new satisfaction. As long as the appreciation of "virtue" satisfied the Greeks they did not modify their education; but when urgent social

and practical problems arose their educational procedure had to be changed. The Romans used only parts of the Greek curriculum, because they had different practical and political problems to be solved. The early church used still less of the Greek and Roman values, because it had religious problems to solve and was working toward religious ideals.

The needs of our experience are diverse. We want food every day. At the same time we want friends, clothing, home, children, and work to do. These are all fundamental values. They are some of the elemental satisfactions for which one strives. One man will steal or kill for food; another man will sacrifice his own food to save his children or a friend. In Russia today men are sacrificing life itself for ideals of patriotism.

While our modern experience exhibits diverse and often conflicting purposes, ends, or ideals, one fundamental pattern is being woven. The deepest needs of living are survival for the individual and for the race. The parent will sacrifice everything for the child. The citizen will risk death to save his nation. These altruistic ideals often compete with and do not always overcome the individual's personal struggle for existence. The personal needs for food, shelter, avoidance of physical pain, etc., frequently come into conflict with the desire for the welfare of others.

Out of the heart of the struggle for existence have arisen these inherited values of experience. Food has been so valuable that nature has implanted a tremendous interest in it in every consciousness. Children are so essential to racial survival that love for them is instinctive in every parent. These instinctive values have assured the survival of the race. Without them individuals would not have preserved themselves and their offspring.

What values must be conserved?—The preceding paragraphs have described the effectiveness of the *fundamental values* of experience in the control of conduct. Out of the racial struggle have these values originated, and in the constant turmoil of living are they perpetuated.

Some values have been so necessary to existence that they have been transmitted from generation to generation as instincts. Illustrations of instinctive values are love for children, appreciation

of food, warmth, and protection, love of one's tribe or country, etc. Whatever values will satisfy an instinct are necessarily appreciated.

The school must take into account these "original satisfiers," as Professor Thorndike calls them. They are the raw material out of which all ideals must be built. The teaching of ideals cannot begin at the middle rung of the ladder (the elaborated values of adult life), but must begin with the lowest rungs, the inherited values. The earliest ideals are very slightly removed from the instinctive values.

The development of an ideal of food conservation will illustrate the point. Appreciation of conservation as an ideal must be built upon the instinct of sympathy. If sympathy with starving peoples is beyond the child's experience some other fundamental interest must be found. Perhaps love of display may be used, and buttons or window cards provided. If the child is anxious to possess a button or window card he will do the things required to obtain one. Or perhaps the deep-seated tendency to hero worship will induce a child to save food "because Mr. Hoover says so."

Acquired values.—Ideals are values which we seek to attain. These values are derived from instinctive values. Professor Thorndike says, "The power that moves the man of science to solve problems correctly is the same as moves him to eat, sleep, rest, and play."

The school aims to teach a great many values, none of which are inherited, but all of which must be linked to or derived from the inherited values. The child acquires a great many values outside of school. When he arrives before the teacher for instruction he has a fund of values and ideals which are inherited, and a fund of values and ideals which have been developed by his own experience out of his inherited values. The teacher's problem is to teach the child to appreciate the ideals and values contained in the subject-matter of the curriculum.

Here is grammar, for instance. It must be learned, therefore it must be appreciated; and this appreciation has to be taught by the teacher. Here is arithmetic. Johnnie may not like it, he may not want to study it, he may see no need for it; but he must learn it. It must acquire a value for him, although it is neither food

nor drink. It is not a game to satisfy the play instinct, nor a person to satisfy the social instinct.

Here is an ideal of truthfulness to be taught to Arthur, who has excellent satisfaction from frequent lies. Loyalty to school discipline must be inculcated, while every value the children possess tends toward loyalty to each other, even though against the teacher and against the best interests of the school.

The teacher must discover methods for teaching these values upon which racial progress depends. It is a general principle that any method used must be in harmony with the nature of experience itself. It is the nature of experience to acquire its values as the solutions of its problems. In order to solve a problem some value must be appreciated; and the converse is true, in order to appreciate a value it must solve a problem.

It is the nature of experience to work toward the attainment of some sort of ends. Always we work toward goals. Ideals are our best goals. They are the best solutions of our problems. The law of appreciation is: We appreciate values or ideals which are the solutions of problems.

The application of this law to teaching evidently follows. Ideals may be taught in only one way: they must be taught as solutions of problems, as satisfactions of wants, as means to overcome difficulties. *The teacher who wishes to teach an ideal or a value must do so by giving the child a problem the solution of which will call into his experience an appreciation of the value to be taught.* To illustrate:

1. For several years doctors have recognized the danger of spreading diseases through coughing and spitting. They have had sufficient power to bring about legislation covering expectoration. But the public was not really educated to recognize the danger of spreading diseases through discharges from the mouth and nose. People had no ideal of personal behavior with regard to sneezing, coughing, and expectorating.

When it was learned that the deadly influenza germ is carried in the spray expelled from the nose and mouth, the information was disseminated broadcast by the doctors. Every man, woman, and child in the United States had a vital problem to solve, namely, how to avoid influenza. They seized upon every fact to help them

solve that problem. Of course the foremost fact which they found was the one which the doctors were insisting upon, that the disease is spread through the spray from the nose and mouth. Further particulars about the "spray zone," and the dangers of crowding and of indiscriminate mingling of people gave the information for the solution of the problem of avoiding contagion. The problem could be solved only by appreciating the value of clean mouth habits and the importance of avoiding those persons who cough and sneeze. Newspaper cartoons showed the public odium gained by anyone who coughed, sneezed, or expectorated in a street car, or in a crowd. One cannot but notice at any gathering of people, such as at church or at the theater, how little coughing is heard compared to previous years.

In this case the problem was made acute by fear and anxiety to avoid a deadly epidemic. The solution of the problem was embodied in facts; but to know the facts was not enough to keep one well. The knowledge had to be appreciated as a cue to action. People generally have followed the course of action recommended by the doctors, who in this instance stand in the relation of teachers.

2. Another illustration of the development of an ideal in conduct as the solution of a problem may also be chosen from the course of recent events.

The entrance of America into the war presented a problem to all loyal Americans. In its broadest statement this problem read: Do I love my country? This problem as a vital issue had not been present in America just before the war. There had been no need to ask the questions, Am I patriotic? Is my neighbor patriotic?

In April, 1917, the problem became acute. Hundreds of thousands of Americans developed an ideal of patriotism to meet the needs of the situation. In the beginning it was very difficult for a great many, who could not fight, to know how to "serve the country." The ideal of patriotism was there, but avenues for its realization had not yet opened. Eventually all who were brave found something to do in the way of self-sacrifice, war work, food conservation, or what not. Those who did not develop and act upon this ideal were stigmatized as slackers.

3. An illustration will now be given of a method of teaching a value in the schoolroom. Suppose a teacher is under the necessity of teaching a lesson in methods of voting. The pupils must learn the details of balloting at elections, but the teacher finds that the class is not interested in the lesson. Its members do not feel the need for the information. The girls have no assurance that they will ever have an opportunity to vote, and the boys expect to gain the information at a later time, when the need for it actually arises.

The teacher's problem is to teach the indifferent class to appreciate the value of the information in the textbook. She may resort to the method known as *dramatization* to make them feel the need for the information. By a tactful handling of the class and by appealing to the play interest she may have the class resolve itself into a republic or a municipality. The pupils already know what a republic and a municipality are. There must be a charter, or a constitution, and laws. There must be someone to see that the laws are executed, an executive. The officers required to handle the state affairs must be chosen and elected.

If dramatization stimulates interest, then methods of holding an election will be studied with enthusiasm, and the need for the facts to be taught will arise as an integral part of the situation created by the teacher. Problems of nomination, of suffrage, of election judges, of balloting, of counting votes, and of announcing returns must now be solved to enable the school activity to go on in the situation entered upon. These problems can be solved only by securing the hitherto uninteresting facts contained in the civics textbook. These facts are the specific values for which the teacher was trying to create a need.

Such values contained in textbooks are called intellectual values and are to be distinguished from patriotism, which is an emotional value; from good health, which is a physical value; or from neatness, which is an aesthetic value.

4. The next illustration will show the method of teaching neatness of composition papers as an ideal.

Let it be supposed that the pupils are careless about the appearance of the papers which they prepare. They lack an ideal of neat

papers. That they need such an ideal is apparent from the untidy appearance of their papers. The teacher must now set a problem to solve, in which the pupils must use an ideal of neatness. Neatness in their composition papers must become important; it must be made a value. Each child must feel that he wants a neat paper and is willing to work hard to realize neatness as a genuine ideal.

The first step in creating such a situation is to set the pupils to thinking about neatness. This may be done by asking these questions: "Do you like a neat and tidy paper better than a rumpled, blotted, and illegible paper? Let us take some time to decide such an important question. You are inclined to answer 'yes' in an offhand way and then to think no more about it. Suppose I hold up before you some samples of the papers handed in by this class. Look at them. Are these papers neat? In what respects do they fail?"

The pupils will discover for themselves that the margins are not even, the lines are not straight, the paper is soiled, and the writing is inelegant or even illegible. Some of the disadvantages of untidiness may be thought out by the pupils themselves. The lack of beauty of the paper is only one of its faults. The pupils themselves find it hard to read, and so does the teacher. The illegibility or blotting of words makes their spelling or meaning uncertain. It is difficult to locate any item in the paper quickly. Lack of orderliness has a bad effect upon clear thinking and efficient organization.

It may be possible to contrast some nearly perfect specimen with the poor papers. Certainly excellent samples of composition forms should be furnished the class as standards for reference. The use of objective standards is an important device in showing children ideals to be attained. This method of contrast is a powerful aid in creating a desire to do better work.

Then the problem must arise in the pupils' minds, What can be done about it? They *want* neat papers, and are now willing to find means to realize that ideal. They must work out their own solution for their problem. They will offer several suggestions, such as

Our pens leak ink, and we need better ones.

The ink is too thick, and we must be careful to see that it is just right.

The paper we write upon is too soft.

These suggestions represent difficulties which must be overcome in order to help the pupils to realize their ideals, but there are other difficulties which can be solved only by trying to reach some standard of neatness.

We must keep our lines straight.

We must keep our margins even.

We must take pains in forming our letters.

These are specific plans for action which the children outline. Other helps may be evolved, such as the exhibition of models or the grading of papers for neatness.

Upon subsequent occasions the ideal of neatness may be made to apply to other things. Blackboard work may be included by showing how it looks when done in a slovenly way, and how much more attractive and legible it is when done neatly. Methods of improving neatness in blackboard work may then be thought out by the pupils themselves. Always they must solve their own problems, working to produce the value they feel.

Meanwhile the teacher can do a great deal by *positive suggestion*. She may tell them the advantages of being neat in every detail of life. She may explain the effects of untidiness upon efficiency. She will point out upon every possible occasion how a paper may be improved or a book preserved. She will describe to them the difference between a tidy and an untidy room, or desk, or bureau drawer. She will tell them that a child who has an *ideal* of neatness will try to be neat everywhere. He will have a tidy yard, he will keep his person clean, and he will look after all his belongings.

Also by *indirect suggestion* the lesson of neatness will be brought home to the children. Let the teacher see that her own person, her own desk, and her own blackboard work exemplify the ideal she is teaching. Teaching by example is always an efficient method; but that alone cannot bring the children to appreciate a value, because every value must solve a problem, meet a need, and help to satisfy experience; and the problem, need, and dissatisfaction must belong to the experience of the children themselves if they are to appreciate and strive to attain the value.

Let us glance over the preceding illustrations. In every case some problem had to be solved by means of values. In the first and second illustrations world-events set the problems. The solutions were offered, first, by the doctors, and secondly, by the persons who outlined the plans for action which had to be pursued to win the war.

In all cases the value or ideal could be realized only through conduct which would carry out the ideals. The people had to avoid coughing and persons who did cough; the American citizen had to enlist in the army, or save food, or give money, or leave his own business and help in the country's business; the pupils in school had to act as if they were voters and elect a ticket; the pupils in the composition class had to keep their pens in order, to notice their handwriting, and the appearance of the writing on the sheet of paper.

There are many ways of "setting the problem" in the school-room, but the principle always remains the same. The problem must grow out of some interest which the children already have. In the case of the election the play interest was used, and the method of developing this play interest was dramatization. Many subjects such as civics, history, and literature lend themselves to dramatization. In the first and second illustrations the interest in good health and in patriotism is fundamental and will always appear in force as soon as these values are jeopardized.

In the last illustration the interest in neatness was assumed to be present, though not effective. It was brought into action by a method of contrasting poor with good work and by holding attention upon the problem through questions.

In helping to any solution of a problem the teacher must use suggestion. "Suggestion" means to come into the situation at the psychological moment and help out with a fact or a direction for further action, or a question to keep the problem in the foreground.

Also the teacher uses indirect suggestion by exemplifying the ideals to be taught. It is not sufficient for a doctor to tell people not to cough in a crowd, when he disobeys his own instructions. A captain who orders his company "Forward!" and then runs away is not an example of bravery. A teacher who tries to teach neatness and scribbles upon the blackboard or is untidy in dress will not be

effective in her instruction. A teacher who tries to teach the facts about voting and is careless about the "rules of the game" will not hold interest in the proceedings.

One last point must be made about the values to be taught. They are, generally speaking, of two types: (1) the specific values (usually intellectual), which the textbook furnishes; and (2) the generic values, which are ideals of conduct.

The specific values of the textbooks are facts of geography, spelling, grammar, etc.; and methods of performing operations to understand or procure facts, as addition, parsing, reading, etc. The methods of teaching these values are already dealt with fully by many textbooks.

At the same time the school is expected to teach many generic values. These are the ideals of conduct upon which human progress depends—ideals of morality, of beauty, of health, of practical efficiency, and of good citizenship. The method of teaching generic values as well as the specific values of life is always the same. Every value is the solution of some problem. The problem must be a genuine difficulty in an experience, and the value to be taught, be it the correct use of "seen" or the importance of truthfulness, must always be the means of overcoming the difficulty.

The general principle then is that the value must be learned and used as the solution of a problem. The application of a general principle is always the difficult part of the program. It is of some assistance, however, to know how these ideals may be taught effectively.

We have indicated the use of several methods in the setting of a problem, in the process of its solution, and in the appreciation of the value found as a solution. Direct and indirect suggestions in guiding the problem toward the desired value and in developing full appreciation of that value are the most useful and generally applicable of the methods to be employed. Contrasting the actual with the ideal is often of great advantage. Dramatization may sometimes be employed to make the situation real in the life of the child. The child must, however, be led to feel his own problem, and to discover and use his own solution.